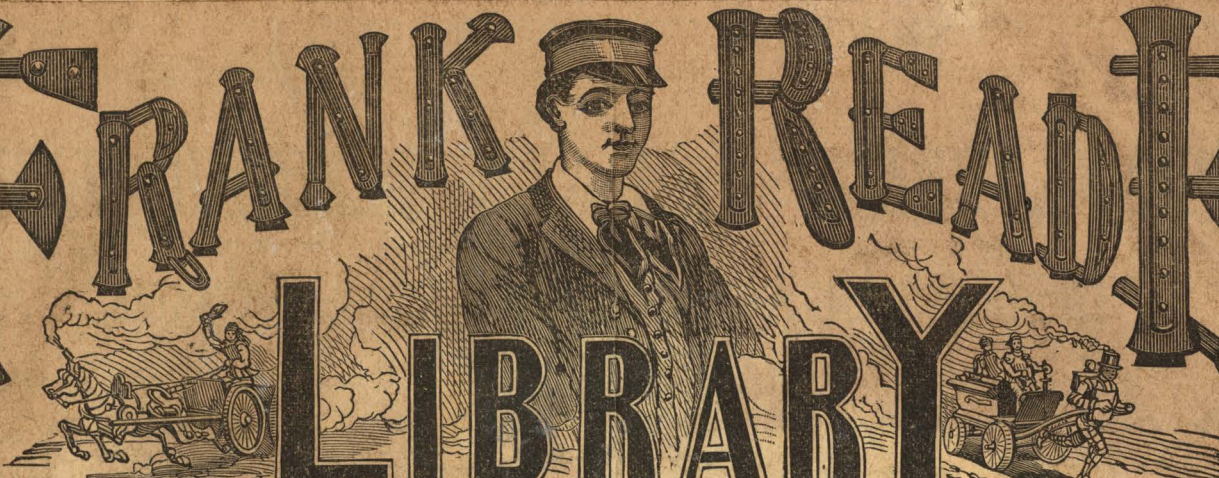


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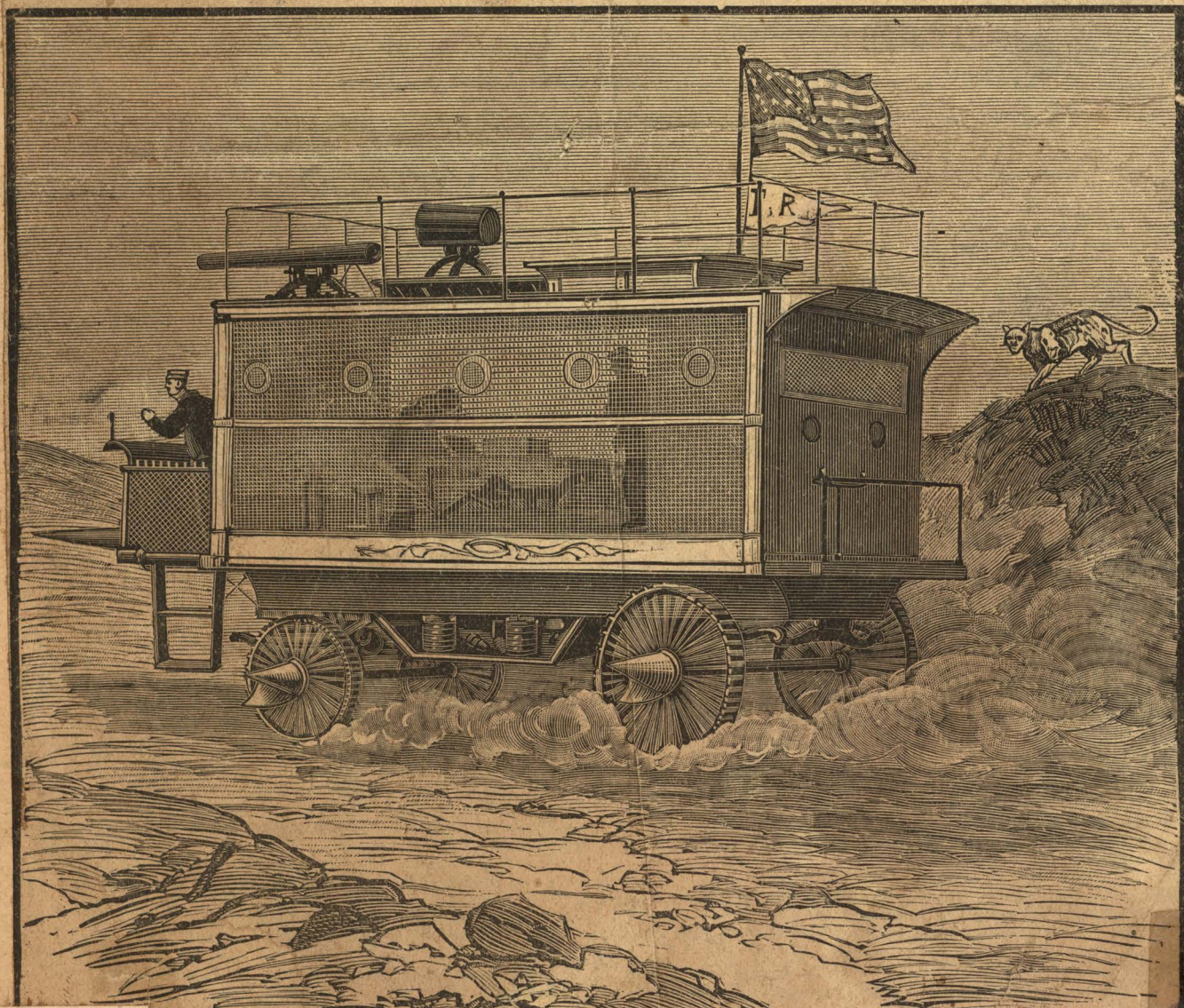
Vol. I

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Frank Reade Jr.'s

NEW ELECTRIC VAN; or, Hunting Wild Animals in the Jungles of India.

By "NONAME."



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FRANK READE JR.'S NEW ELECTRIC VAN:

OR,

Hunting Wild Animals in the Jungles of India.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Frank Reade and His Steam Tally-ho," "Frank Reade and His Steam Team," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE CIRCUS MAN.

"Is Mr. Frank Reade, Jr., in?"

"'Deed, sah, I done fink he am!"

"I would like to see him!"

"If yo' gib me yo' card, sah, I take it to him!"

"Here it is!"

This conversation took place at the gate entrance to the large yard surrounding the extensive machine shops in Readestown, U. S. A.

These shops were the property of Frank Reade, Jr., a wonderful inventor of many curious machines, and whose reputation was world-wide.

The man who applied for an interview with the young inventor was a short, thick-set man, flashily dressed, but yet with an open, honest countenance and a whole-souled hearty manner, which at once gave one a favorable impression.

The darky at the gate was short and stout, with a genuine African type of features and gleaming ivories.

He took the card and said:

"A'right, sah! I gib dis to Marse Frank, an' bring back de answer directly!"

"Hold on, you ace of spades!" cried the visitor, good humoredly.

"Don't be off so quick. I want to speak with you!"

"Well, sah, what you hab wif me?"

"You're a dandy, ain't you! I've heard lots about you! Ain't your name Pomp?"

The darky grinned.

"Dat am what it am, sah!"

"I thought so. Hain't you got a working companion called Barney O'Shea?"

"Bejabbers, an' phwat will yez have with me?" came a voice in a rich brogue from beyond the gate.

There, at Pomp's side, appeared a genuine type of the Celt, with broad, grinning mug, and a comical twinkle in his dancing gray eyes.

"Oh, you're there, are you?" cried the visitor in a hearty way.

"Well, I'm glad to meet Barney and Pomp. I've heard of you, as I guess everybody else has in the wide world."

The big man held out his hand and Barney took it.

"Begorra, I'm likin' the luks of yez; but divil a bit do I remember yez at all, at all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the visitor. "I reckon ye don't. Well, here's my card. I'm well known myself!"

Barney took the card and read aloud:

"Walsingham Gladwell, of Gladwell's Famous Four Continent and Intellectual Exposition of Zoological Research, New York City."

Barney and Pomp tried to read the card.

"Begorra, av yez wud talk Irish, shure I'd ingage to understand yez!" he cried. "But divil a bit can I mispronounce sich worruds as thim!"

At this Walsingham Gladwell nearly collapsed with laughter.

"Well, I don't know as I blame you!" he cried. "It does hold some big words. However, you'll understand when I say that I run a large circus."

Barney's eyes snapped.

"Shure it's a circus, is it?" he cried, "then, bejabbers, I'm onto yez. But ye'll niver foind a betther curiosity thim the naygur here. Shure they'd cum from iverywhere to luk at the loikes av him."

"Golly, sah, jes' yo' listen to dis chile!" protested Pomp. "Dat am de only giniwine Irish ape dat am lef' on dis yearth. It wud be de bes' card yo' cud get."

Walsingham Gladwell roared.

He knew from report that Barney and Pomp were in their element when engaged in roasting each other.

They were the warmest of friends and yet unsparing in the perpetration of practical jokes one upon the other.

"Irish ape!" roared Gladwell. "That is a good one. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shure yez have insulted me, naygur!" sputtered Barney. "It's

yesilf as was a monkey afore iver yez war a man. Whurroo! Take that fer yer impudence—an' that!"

A pail of dirty water sat upon a platform by the gate.

Barney had picked it up and dashed it full at Pomp.

Its contents took the darky full in the face and with demoralizing effect.

The dirty water went down the darky's throat, into his eyes, ears, and nigh strangled him.

"Jes' yo' stop o' dat, I'ish!" he yelled when he recovered his breath. "I jes' hab yo' life fo' dat!"

Gladwell was convulsed. He thought it was awful funny.

But Barney was out of Pomp's reach. He had sprung up a short ladder to the high brick wall above and had pulled the ladder up after him.

Pomp could not reach him, though the darky was furious to think that he could not do so.

So the two jokers contented themselves with hurling harmless epithets.

They soon tired of this, however, and Pomp turned to Gladwell:

"Beg yo' pardon, sah, but I would jes' hab taken yo' card in long afo' dis if it hadn't been fo' dat sassy I'ishman. I break his jaw when he comes down!"

"Look here!" said Gladwell, sobering down, "I want to make a proposition to you chaps."

"Well, sah?" said Pomp.

"Phwat do you say?" asked Barney, all interest.

"You know I'm a circus man. Now, such noted people as you and your famous employer, Mr. Reade, would be worth a pile of money to me in my circus. If I can hire you all, with Mr. Reade's famous airship or Steam Man, to give exhibitions and travel with my circus, my fortune will be made."

Walsingham Gladwell thus plainly set forth the object of his visit.

Pomp and Barney exchanged glances.

For the time being they intuitively agreed to a truce, and Barney came down from the wall.

"Huh!" said Pomp, doubtfully. "I don' beliebe yo' git Marse Frank to do dat."

"Begorra, yez kin bet on it!" asseverated Barney.

But Gladwell smiled.

"Don't you be too sure, friends. I am here after you and I want and must have you!"

"Well, sah," said Pomp, plainly, "you will hab to talk wif Marse Frank ober dat fing. Dat am all, sah."

"And that is what I want to do. Take in my card."

"All right, sah!"

Pomp vanished.

In a few moments he returned.

"All right, sah; Marse Frank will see yo' in his office."

"Good enough!"

Gladwell followed the darky across the yard.

In a corner of the main building Frank Reade, Jr., had an office or private room where he draughted all the plans of his inventions.

Into this Gladwell was led.

He stood face to face with the most famous young man of the day. Frank Reade, Jr., was of medium height, rather slender, but with well knit frame and handsome features, frank and brave and honest. He held out his hand with a pleasant smile.

"Well, Gladwell," he cried, "I am glad to see you."

"The same, Mr. Reade!" said the circus owner, affably.

"We have not met before for three years?"

"About that time!"

"I have not forgotten how you saved my life in that railroad accident at Chicago!"

"That was nothing. I was very glad to have the honor!"

"I owe you a great debt. Is there any way in which I can repay it?"

A light broke across Gladwell's face.

"Yes!" he cried. "If you choose to do so!"

"What can I do?"

"It will be something which I can make of mutual advantage!"

"Indeed!"

"You know that I run a circus?"

"Yes!"

"Well, you and your two men, Barney and Pomp, with one or two of your wonderful machines would be the greatest attraction on earth!"

Frank looked at Gladwell to see if he really was in earnest and then laughed musically.

"You don't really mean that, Gladwell?"

"Yes, I do!"

"But how could I consent to travel with your show? I have too many projects on hand."

"But the money that would be in it both for you and me!"

Frank looked serious.

"The money consideration, my dear Gladwell, is no object to me!" he said. "I have all that I want. Let me suggest to you a better plan for rendering you a service. You will make almost as well out of it!"

Gladwell looked eager.

"What do you mean?"

"I have just invented a new machine for a purpose which will hit your case. You have come along just in the nick of time."

"Indeed?"

"My new Electric Van is specially constructed for the purpose of traveling in parts of the world thickly infested with ravenous wild beasts."

"Electric Van?"

"Yes."

"What kind of a machine is that?"

"You shall see it and then I can the more fully explain it to you!"

"But I cannot see in what way it will benefit me if you will not consent to travel one season with my show. Mind you, I am not asking this favor on the score of any obligation you may feel under to me. It is purely a business motive."

"I appreciate the fact," said Frank, quietly, "but no pecuniary consideration would induce me to travel!"

"Then I need not waste further time here?"

"I shall be very glad to render you assistance in another way."

"But I do not seek it in any other way!" said Gladwell.

"Come now, Gladwell, old friend, don't be unreasonable."

"Well, in what manner can you help me as well as to travel with me?"

"Sit down here and I will tell you. Then we will go in and take a look at my latest invention."

Gladwell could not refuse this generous offer.

CHAPTER II.

THE ELECTRIC VAN—EXPERIENCE WITH A CRANK.

SEATED at a table, Frank unfolded a map of India.

"Here is a map of one of the wildest parts of the earth," he declared. "In Central and Upper India there are large tracts of country which man never dares to cross. Even the scientist and explorer dare not invade the region."

"Indeed!"

"It is a fact."

"Why is it so perilous?"

"On account of the ferocity and number of wild beasts. There are several species believed to be in existence there which many people had disputed the existence of and which zoologists have not classified."

Gladwell was mightily interested.

"You don't mean it?"

"Yes, I do. There, for instance, is the white panther. I am well assured that numbers of this beast exist in the jungles of Bang Chu."

"White panther! Why, such a beast in this country would draw a million dollars in less than no time."

"That is what I am telling you. There is the cardinal emu. Such a bird would be a wonder in civilized parts."

"I should say so!"

"Then there is the black lion, the double-headed bear and many other animals which I will not mention. All these are known to exist in the jungles of Bang Chu."

"Do you believe that?"

"Certainly I do."

"But—they never could be captured."

"They could; at least, they could be shot and mounted as rare specimens!"

"Ah, but you say that white men dare not invade that jungle?"

"I dare invade any part of India, or any other country with my Electric Van!" said Frank.

The circus owner looked at Frank inscrutably.

"You are too deep for me!" he said, slowly. "I understand you now!"

"In my electric invention I intend to make a trip to Central India and explore the jungles of Bang Chu. I offer you the privilege of going with me if you choose. It looks like an excellent opportunity to make up a good menagerie!"

Walsingham Gladwell passed a hand across his brow.

"Do you mean that, Frank?" he said, in a bewildered manner.

"Yes, I do."

"That settles it! My fortune is made. My partner shall travel alone with the show this season. I will advertise the world over that I have gone to India with Frank Reade, Jr., to procure animals for my show, and the whole of America will be on the *qui vive* until our

return. Frank, your hand. You are right. It is the greatest favor you can bestow upon me. When will we start?"

"One week from to-day!"

"Good! I see you adhere to your old plan of immediate action."

"It is the best!"

"Every time!"

"But come!" said Frank Reade, Jr., with a light laugh. "Let me show you the Electric Van, with which we will invade the dangerous jungles of Bang Chu!"

"I shall be delighted!"

They passed from the office into a large, high-roofed chamber, one hundred feet long by fifty broad.

Here the circus proprietor beheld a wonderful sight.

The Electric Van, Frank Reade, Jr.'s latest invention, was before him.

In appearance it was a large, square, van-shaped vehicle, upon four light wheels, with broad bands and grooved tires.

The body of the wagon rested upon light steel axles, with some clever undergirding, and fine system of cogs, by which great speed could be attained with a small pressure of electric force.

In the center of the wagon and partly underneath was the dynamo, motor and electrical machinery.

Wire nettings of the finest woven meshes of steel covered the sides and top of the van.

This was impervious to rifle balls, and at intervals loop-holes were made for the inmates to fire through.

The rear of the wagon consisted of two broad swinging steel doors and a platform.

In front was a dasher, with the key-board and steering wheel. On the dasher was a long, spike-shaped ram, as keen pointed as a needle.

Also the hubs of the wheels were armed with sharp, scythe-shaped knives, so that a path could be literally mowed through any dense grasses in the jungle.

This, in the main, constitutes the description of the Electric Van.

The interior was elegantly fitted up with rich-cushioned bunks of leather, lockers for ammunition, stores and weapons.

All the necessary instruments for such a trip were on hand.

Walsingham Gladwell was carried away with the Van.

"Wonderful beyond description!" he cried. "How much speed do you reckon you can get up, Frank?"

"I can beat a railroad train."

"Sho! You don't mean it?"

"Yes, I do!"

"But—"

"What?"

"How will you ever get the Van out there to India?"

"Easy enough. It can be packed in sections and easily put together when we get there."

"Good! We will go by the Pacific Mail Line?"

"By the most direct route!"

"And start next week?"

"Yes!"

"I will be on hand. Walsingham Gladwell is a happy man. Now I must away to make preparations."

The next day the news traveled all over the country.

The newspapers took up the report that Frank Reade, Jr., had come out with a new invention and would make a trip to India.

Glaring posters were issued for the great Gladwell Circus, announcing the absence of the proprietor in India in quest of the scarlet emu and the white panther.

Of course all those reports created a tremendous furore.

The result was that Gladwell's Circus received an advertisement such as it had never known before.

As the day drew nearer for the start of the expedition to India, Frank Reade, Jr., became besieged with all manner of strange requests.

Crank sent him threatening letters, others sought to beg or buy the privilege of being a fellow passenger.

One incident of a thrilling kind befell Frank.

He was leaving the yard one evening after dark, and just as he was about to step into his carriage, a man of wild appearance stepped up.

"Frank Reade," he said in bitter tones, "you occupy the field which is mine by all rights. I am really a greater inventor than you, but because you occupy my field I cannot get recognition. Therefore it is written that you must die, that I may succeed you!"

At the same instant the fellow put the muzzle of a pistol to Frank's head.

Just in time the young inventor struck the barrel up.

A moment more and the bullet would have gone crashing through his brain.

As it was it broke the glass in the coach door and set the horses beyond the driver's control.

Frank instantly hurled his assailant to the ground.

Fortunately an officer was near at hand.

He quickly had the fellow manacled and took him away to prison.

The next day Frank appeared against the crank, who gave his name as Stillman True.

The judge sentenced him to three months in jail.

But as he was led from the court-room he turned, and, with a face blue with passion, he hissed:

"Curse you, Frank Reade, Jr., you shall not escape me. I will pursue you yet."

Frank speedily forgot the incident in the excitement of the departure.

The Electric Van was packed in sections and shipped to San Francisco.

But just as they were about to take the cars from Readestown Frank read in a newspaper:

"Thrilling escape of a crank from the jail. Stillman True, the man who assaulted Frank Reade, Jr., nearly brains Turnkey Wallis and makes his escape!"

"Mercy on us!" thought the young inventor. "Can it be possible that that villain really intends to follow me?"

But Frank would not entertain the thought.

The party reached San Francisco in safety and went aboard the steamer.

Soon they were sailing out through the Golden Gate en route to the west.

All were in high spirits.

Walsingham Gladwell was particularly hilarious, and actually danced a jig in his delight.

But among the passengers was one individual who regarded the party covertly and with an evil sneer.

He was dressed slouchily and wore a long, black beard.

To a close observer it would have seemed as if this was artificial.

The steamer, however, was two days out from San Francisco before any incident occurred to mar the voyage.

Then one moonlight evening all were congregated upon the deck.

Barney had his fiddle and Pomp his banjo.

The two jokers were entertaining the crowd with alternate songs. Barney had a fine, rich voice, and sang sentimental as well as comical ditties.

Pomp had a beautiful tenor voice, and his rendering of some of the old plantation songs was indescribable.

"Och, Rory, be aisy, don't kiss me no more,

Shure, it's six toimes to-day ye've kissed me before.

Och, there goes another, an' there to make sure,

Sure there's luck in odd numbers, says Rory O'More."

Everybody applauded, and then Pomp got in his work in fine shape. It was certainly quite a treat.

Frank Reade, Jr., presently strolled away from the others, going aft.

He was busily thinking of the future, and was in a retired part of the ship.

He never suspected the fact that a dark form was creeping up behind him stealthily.

Leaning over the rail, Frank was watching the sea, when he heard a rustling sound behind him.

He turned just in time to recognize a man springing upon him.

It was the man with the whiskers, and he hissed fiercely:

"Ah, I tell you that Stillman True is not to be baffled. This time you die!"

A sharp cry escaped Frank's lips.

But before he could get into position to defend himself, his assailant had hurled him over the rail bodily.

CHAPTER III.

IN CALCUTTA.

Down went Frank Reade, Jr., into the sea.

A great cry went up from his lips. But it did not seem to have been heard.

The singing forward drowned it, and he realized in an instant how utterly desperate his situation was.

The steamer, of course, was leaving him every instant.

In a comparatively short time it would be out of sight.

He was a good swimmer, but he could not hope to keep afloat long.

"My God! I am lost!" he cried. "Help—give me help!"

But there seemed no answer to his prayer.

Those on board the ship either did not hear him, or would not answer.

But no! Suddenly there was a great shout went up.

There had been a sailor on one of the yards, and he heard the splash, and turned just in time to see Frank in the water astern.

"Man overboard!" he shouted.

The cry went from one end of the ship to the other.

"Man overboard!"

It is ever a thrilling cry at sea, and impresses one with horror. In an instant everybody rushed to the rail.

The bell rang in the engine-room to slacken speed.

Down from the davits went a boat, quickly manned.

Sturdy tars pulled away astern looking for the victim.

Frank was still afloat, for he was a good swimmer.

He shouted to the boat's crew and they were soon by his side.

In a jiffy he was lifted into the boat.

His life was spared.

"Why, it's Mr. Reade!" cried the boatswain. "However did ye come to fall over, Mr. Reade?"

"I didn't fall. I was thrown over!" cried Frank.

"Thrown over?"

"Yes!"

"May the saints save us! How did that happen, sir?"

Frank described the incident.

The boat's crew listened with horror.

"I know the sculpin ye refer to, Mr. Reade!" cried the boatswain, "and I've never liked his looks since he's been aboard. We will put him in irons!"

The ship had come about and was lying to.

The boat now ran alongside and Frank ran up the gangway.

He was greeted instantly by his friends.

He explained matters, and much excitement was created.

A search was made for Stillman True, the would-be assassin.

But now a singular thing occurred.

He could not be found.

What did it mean?

Where had he gone?

Had he also thrown himself overboard and drowned himself? This was a query not easily answered.

The ship was searched assiduously from deck to hold.

But not a trace of True could be found.

He had mysteriously disappeared.

It was believed by the majority that he had committed suicide.

And there the matter rested.

The voyage was continued.

But Frank never went near the rail without a premonition of something terrible, and kept his eye out.

But to all appearances, the crank had left the ship.

Indeed, the vessel was nearly into Honolulu before anything happened to warrant a different belief.

Then an idea occurred to Frank.

He hastened to the hold.

There was stored in sections the wonderful Electric Van.

A horrifying fear taught the young inventor the extreme danger of leaving the boxes unguarded, with a madman somewhere at large upon the boat.

It would be an easy matter for him to damage the machine out of pure spite and meanness.

Frank went down into the hold and made an examination of the boxes.

To his great relief, he found, however, that no harm had been done the machine.

Indeed, it did not appear that the crank had touched it at all, which was only another fact to bear out the supposition that he was not on board the ship at all, but had committed suicide by leaping overboard.

Nothing more occurred during the voyage to disturb its tranquillity.

In due course of time the ship reached port at Calcutta.

There the Van was packed in sections aboard a railroad car.

The railroad ran along the valley of the Ganges river for several hundred miles.

At Calcutta many English and American residents came to pay their respects to the explorers.

Their fame had preceded them, and one great Hindoo prince, whose domain extended to the verge of the Bang Chu jungle, came to visit Frank.

He came in state, with a body-guard of armed men, and met the young explorer with great cordiality.

"Ah, sahib," he said through his interpreter, "if you can succeed in hunting down the fierce white tiger, you will have won the gratitude of all my people."

"I shall try," replied Frank.

"I shall pray to my gods for your success. But there is another and more dangerous foe I must warn you against while in Nepal."

"Indeed!"

"That is the Thug. That region is their native home."

"I will remember your warning, great prince!" said Frank, gratefully. "Perhaps I shall meet you again?"

"I return to Nepal next month. You will be welcome at my palace!"

All over the Indian part of Calcutta traveled the news of the arrival of the distinguished American who had come to India to clean out the dread jungle of Bang Chu.

The native Hindoos flocked to the railroad station in great numbers to get a glimpse of the famous new-comer.

Native princes and dignitaries called upon Frank and extended to him hospitable greetings and best wishes.

It was with difficulty that the party finally got away from Calcutta.

The railroad train finally took them up the valley of the Ganges as far as the line of travel extended.

Then the party disembarked at a small station in the verge of a vast forest.

It was five hundred miles from there to the jungle of Bang Chu.

The country in some places was rough and uneven.

Several mountain ranges would have to be crossed.

But beyond these there was full two hundred miles of level plain which it would be easy to cross.

The small station at which they disembarked was called Hudi Jan.

The Van was taken from the cars, and Barney and Pomp, under Frank's direction, proceeded to put it together.

This was not altogether a difficult job.

Finally the last bolt had been driven and the last nut tightened, and the Electric Van was ready.

The batteries were filled and the motor charged.

Then all the stores were placed aboard and all was ready for the start.

Of course all this work had taken some time.

But the job was finally finished after a day and a half had passed.

The voyagers went aboard the Van, and the start was made.

There was a turnpike road leading out of Hudi Jan for twenty miles.

This extended through a picturesque tract of country. In a measure, it was an agricultural region. Small plantations were seen, and some fine bungalows, or Hindoo houses, were passed.

The natives everywhere dropped their implements and stood agape at sight of the Electric Van.

It was altogether a curious sight to them.

Never before had so strange a machine invaded the region.

It was, therefore, no wonder that they were astonished.

But none offered anything like hostile opposition to the Van.

In some place superstitious ones flung themselves on their faces, overcome with fear and horror.

Our adventurers in the Van enjoyed the situation.

Upon every hand there was some new wonder to be seen.

The country was wild and picturesque and unlike anything they had ever visited before.

Walsingham Gladwell was in his element.

He was so much pleased with his experience that he danced and capered and sang lively songs.

"Hurrah! I wouldn't have missed this trip for the price of my show!" he cried. "It is simply grand."

Barney manipulated the steering wheel, and Pomp attended to the dynamos and to the culinary department.

It was easy sailing as far as the highway went.

But when this finally terminated it was not so easy.

A region was now encountered of thick forests and dense canebrakes.

To penetrate these it was necessary to take narrow paths used by the natives, and often it was imperative to stop and fell trees to make the way broad enough for the Van to pass.

In the ordinary canebrake the knives upon the hubs of the wheels would cut their passage through.

But, of course, in the forest this could not be done.

But the spirits of all were high.

There were plenty of provisions on board the Van.

But at available opportunities Frank sent Barney and Pomp into the woods for game.

Rice and corn and other articles of food were also bought of the natives.

Game was plenty.

Deer and bear were in the forests, and ducks and wild geese in the canebrakes.

Of course Pomp and Barney enjoyed this.

The foe they had dreaded most was the deadly cobra di capelle, or hooded snake.

These were very plenty, and their poison was fatal.

But the adventurers had made provision for this before leaving home.

They had provided themselves with long leggins of rawhide.

The fangs of the cobra, unlike those of the rattlesnake, are weak and brittle.

Against the rawhide they were of no avail whatever.

CHAPTER IV. THE GIANT PYTHON.

So that they were completely safe with regard to the hooded snake. The reptiles in some places were very plentiful.

In fact, Barney was struck in the lower part of his legs eleven times one day, while hunting in the canebrakes.

Had it not been for the impervious character of the rawhide he would have been a corpse.

There were other foes to be dreaded.

One of these was the brown python, a monster which frequently attained the stupendous length of forty feet.

The party were enjoying a nooning in a shady dell in the forest one day, when suddenly one of these monsters appeared.

Barney was the first to espy his snakeship.

Frank Reade, Jr., was aboard the Electric Van.

Gladwell was procuring water at a spring near, while Barney and Pomp were engaged in skinning the carcass of a fine wood deer.

It was no doubt the smell of the blood that had drawn the python to the spot.

Barney heard a rustling in the undergrowth and turned suddenly to behold a horrifying spectacle.

The reptile's head protruded through the green foliage not ten feet distant.

Its eyes were fixed with a basilisk-like gleam upon Barney.

The Celt for a moment felt sick and faint.

An awful horror was upon him, and it seemed as if he was likely to come under the influence of that awful fascination which the serpent is said to exert.

But the Celt knew well what this would mean.

With a tremendous exertion of will power he broke away from the spell and cried:

"Och hone! Wud yez luk at the loikes av it! Shure it's a fearful craythur. Run, naygur—run fer yer loife!"

"Golly!" exclaimed Pomp, making a bolt for the Van.

Both terrified fellows ran for the Electric Van.

They were shouting at the top of their lungs.

Walsingham Gladwell dropped his water bucket and also started for the Van.

Meanwhile the python very coolly glided out of the undergrowth.

It was a literal monster, and its shining brown folds seemed fearful in their length and circumference.

But the python was not inclined to heed the Van.

It was the carcass of the deer it was after.

But the scent of blood had brought to the spot another aspirant for a hearty meal.

This was a huge, yellow tiger, which now came leaping gracefully out of the forest.

The tiger came down in a crouching attitude upon the opposite side of the deer from the python.

It was a tableau.

Between the two gourmands was the dainty prize.

The tiger lashed its tail and growled, with its eyes fixed upon the snake.

The latter drew its sinuous coils up and gave a tremendous hiss.

By this time Gladwell had reached the Van and all were safely aboard.

"Begorra, it's a foight they'll have!" screamed Barney. "Shure, it's the snake an' the tiger!"

Pomp had picked up his rifle and seemed inclined to fire.

But Frank Reade, Jr., cried:

"Hold on, Pomp!"

"A'right, Marse Frank!"

"Let us see what they will do. It is likely they will eat each other up."

Indeed, this was likely.

Neither seemed disposed to give in, and this was evidence of their ravenous hunger.

"Whew!" exclaimed Gladwell, rubbing his hands. "Don't I wish I could get hold of that python! He'd be worth ten thousand dollars to my show!"

"It is hardly likely that you will succeed, unless the tiger is his prey," said Frank.

"Of course the tiger will whip him."

Frank shook his head.

"Not much!" he replied. "That is by no means certain. The python is a bad one to handle."

All now watched with interest the movements of the two foes.

Neither seemed disposed to yield ground to the other.

The appetizing meal between them was sufficient incentive for a battle to the death.

The tiger crouched low and lashed its tail furiously.

The python's huge coils were drawn up and its head was reared high.

Suddenly it shot forward, the immense coils unrolled like a whip lash.

That moment would have been fatal for the tiger but for prompt movement upon the part of the beast.

The tiger did not attempt to dodge the attack.

Nor did he retreat.

On the contrary, he crouched flat upon the ground, burying his nose between his paws.

The python's coils rolled harmlessly over him.

It was impossible for them to close around him. Had the tiger been in an erect posture they would have done so.

But the instinct of the savage beast had saved it.

The instant the python's folds passed, however, the tiger acted.

Quick as a flash up went one paw and the sharp claws tore a long rent in the python's body.

The snake gave a fearful hiss and whirled about.

Down went the tiger again.

Once more the huge folds passed harmlessly over the tiger's striped body.

Again the tiger's claws tore a rent in the python's folds.

"Golly!" cried Pomp. "Dat am jes' a dreiful sharp old cat, dat tigh am."

"Begorra, av he keeps on he'll tear the reptile into ribbons!" cried Barney.

"Wait awhile," said Frank.

"Confound it, it is too bad!" cried Gladwell. "It will spoil the reptile for a specimen!"

The snake seemed in great pain over the wounds it had received.

It did not venture another such attack upon the tiger.

To the contrary, it adopted new and curious tactics.

Coiling itself upon the opposite side of the dead deer, the snake threw a single fold about a banyan tree.

Then it lay low upon the ground just as the tiger had.

But the huge head began to glide slowly but steadily toward the carcass of the antelope.

The tiger growled savagely and its eyes flamed luridly.

"Now we shall see fun!" cried Frank Reade, Jr.

And he was right.

The tiger saw that the snake's game was to assume the defensive and try to swallow the prey right before his eyes.

It was now the tiger's turn to assume the offensive.

This changed the aspect of affairs quite materially.

"I'll bet on the snake now!" cried Gladwell, excitedly.

The snake's head slowly worked its way toward the antelope.

Yet its eyes seemed fixed upon the tiger.

That beast growled savagely and began also to creep toward the carcass.

The snake's jaws seemed about to close upon it.

Now or never!

Thus the tiger must have thought, for he flung himself forward and made a blow at the snake's head with his paw.

But he might as well have made a pass at a shadow.

The snake dodged quick as a flash.
Then out shot those terrible coils.
This time the tiger could not dodge. The coils closed about him with a crunching sound.
Up into the air and over and over went tiger and reptile.
The tiger's claws were flying everywhere and his hoarse growls filled the air.
But the python's folds were about him, and crushing vitals, bone and sinew and flesh all to a pulp.
Around the glade like a huge ball furiously went the combatants.
Then the din ceased.
Suddenly the python ceased its revolutions. There was a crushed yellow body in its giant folds.
There was one less tiger in the wilds of Nepal.
The python dropped its victim and now started with a gliding motion for its prize.
Our adventurers each drew a deep breath.
It had certainly been a wonderful spectacle.
It was safe to say that few human beings had ever witnessed its like.

"Begorra, I niver seen the loikes av that!" cried Barney. "Shure both av thim was dead game to the last."
"Golly, but I done flink I wouldn't like to hab been in dat tigah's place!" cried Pomp, with a deep breath.
"No," said Frank; "the python is a hard reptile to handle."
"What a beauty he is!" cried Gladwell. "Oh, if I only had him for a specimen in my show."
Barney had raised his rifle.
"Shure I'll quick spile the ugly mug av him!" he cried.
But Frank interfered.
"Hold on!" he cried. "Did you say, Gladwell, that you wanted that python?"
"Yes."
"You shall have him."
"But—how can we trap him?"
"Keep quiet and I will tell you."
"I'll do that."

"After he has gorged himself upon the antelope he will go into a kind of stupor. You can then hire a dozen natives for a song to net him. In the net he can be dragged into a cage and taken to Calcutta and shipped home for you by the natives."
"Good!" cried Gladwell, excitedly. "It will be worth a fortune to me."

The python did just what Frank said it would.
The reptile began the process of swallowing the antelope.
This was the most astounding spectacle yet.
To see that mass of flesh disappearing slowly down the snake's throat was a sight of no ordinary sort.
It required fully twelve hours for the python to swallow the antelope sufficiently to go into a torpor.
Then Barney was sent to the nearest bungalow.
A half score of natives were easily hired for the purpose of netting the huge monster.
They returned to the spot with Barney, and after an interview with Frank Reade, Jr., proceeded to bag the python.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE POWER OF A THUG.

This was also a wonderful spectacle. A huge and powerful net, with many folds, was procured.

This was thrown over the snake's head, and then spears were jabbed into the reptile's body.

In a few moments the reptile, writhing in pain, wound itself so completely in the net that it was powerless.

Then a native ox cart was procured, and the snake, with its tons of weight, was dragged aboard.

It would require two weeks to get the reptile to Hudi Jan.

But there Gladwell had appointed shipping agents, who would see that the snake was safely caged and cared for and shipped by steamer for San Francisco.

The natives departed with the python after being assured that they would be well paid when they reached Hudi Jan.

Gladwell was delighted.

He had procured a specimen for his show, which for size had never been equaled in America.

"I will astonish everybody!" he cried. "Gladwell's Circus will take the lead."

The Van now pushed on deeper into the wilds.

The region grew wilder and less thickly inhabited.

Thus far Frank had seen nothing of the Thugs, against whom he had been warned.

One day they met a native hunter, who told them that they were only fifty miles from the Bang Chu jungle.

He directed them to go to the northward, when they would come to the open plain, and all would be clear traveling.

Frank followed these directions and found them to be true.

The jungle was reached in quick time.

The wonderful and dangerous Bang Chu jungle lay before them.

None of the natives dared to invade its depths, which were said to literally swarm with wild beasts.

In the verge of the jungle they came upon a village of Hamados, a Hindoo sect.

The head man or prince of the place consulted with Frank.

The young explorer was not favorably impressed with his appearance.

When he had gone, he said jocularly to Gladwell:

"There, Gladwell, if you had that fellow in your show, you would have the greatest curiosity of all!"

"Catch him and muzzle him!" cried the circus man.

But Sado-Dak, which was the ruler's name, gave Frank some valuable information.

His description of the jungle and its terrors was of the lurid, blood-curdling kind.

"Sahib will find many dangers there!" he declared. "There is the white panther, the giant bear, and the mighty dragon. In the center of Bang Chu there is a vast lake, in which is a mighty serpent capable of opening its huge mouth and swallowing up a boat with ten men in it."

Many more Munchausen tales were rendered Frank.

The young inventor listened with great seriousness.

But when Sado-Dak was gone, he said:

"That is the biggest rogue and most atrocious liar I have met since I have been in India!"

The Hamados were all of a low caste, and beyond all doubt cut-throats and ruffians.

Frank remembered the warning he had received in Calcutta.

That these villagers were of the Thug denomination he had no doubt.

He warned Barney and Pomp, and preparations were made to resist any attack made upon the Van.

They were obliged to linger for two days at the village of the Hamados on account of a dearth of provisions.

There was, of course, no path into the jungle of Bang Chu.

But Frank felt sure that they could mow a way through the dense grasses with the scythe blades upon the hubs and in front of the Van.

Barney and Pomp were wise enough to heed Frank's warnings.

But Gladwell was not inclined to be so distrustful.

The circus proprietor regarded the Hamados as innocent and ignorant natives.

"They can possibly mean no harm," he declared. "I am not afraid of them."

"You have heard of the deadly disciples of Thuggee?" asked Frank.

"Pooh! You mean those wretches who come up behind you and garrote you?"

"Yes."

"I am not afraid of them. I can keep an eye out, and it will be a smart man who garrotes me."

It was of no use to argue with Gladwell.

The circus magnate only laughed and pooh-poohed the subject deservingly.

So it happened that when Frank and Barney and Pomp were not looking, he slipped out of the Van and paid a visit to the town.

He was received with the greatest of courtesy.

The Hamado merchants threw open the flaps of their tents, and invited him in to partake of hasheesh or smoke a weed allied to tobacco, or drink wine.

Gladwell went upon a kind of spree, as it were.

He joked with the Hindoos, flirted with their women, and incautiously showed that he had money with him.

He had spent some hours in the town, and was having a high old time when a native approached him.

He had a smattering of English, and, bowing low, said:

"Sahib, I greet you. Great prince of a mighty nation, I pay you homage."

"Go easy, friend!" cried Gladwell, with a laugh. "I ain't used to taffy. What do you want? A ticket to my show?"

"Sahib is looking for wonderful animals to cage and curious things?"

"I am!" cried Gladwell. "Have you got a six-legged rhinoceros to sell?"

"Ah, come with me, sahib. I will show you the most wonderful yet."

Gladwell was usually a sharp man.

In his own country the bunco sharp would have had no show what-ever with him.

But here in the heart of ignorant India he allowed himself to be victimized.

The native, a villainous-looking fellow, who gave the name of Mahdan, led the way to a grove of trees near the town.

He pretended that in this belt of trees there was kept a wonderful animal the like of which existed nowhere else.

Soon they had reached the forest and entered a narrow path.

This was thickly beset with overhanging vines, which in places nearly shut out the light of day.

Mahdan led the way into this path.

Gladwell had not proceeded ten yards when a fearful sense of appalling danger came over him.

He suddenly remembered with a chill Frank Reade, Jr.'s warning. The instinct was upon him to turn back.

They were just passing under an overhanging limb of a tree, when Mahdan suddenly paused.

"Ah, sahib, look!" he cried. "Behold the wonder of Bang Chu!"

In that instant Gladwell heard a noise behind him.

Before he could turn something flashed bisping past his head, and a sinewy coil was about his neck.

"The Thug!" flashed across his horrified vision, then there was a wrenching, awful pain; unconsciousness followed.

Gladwell's form lay in the path, and two villainous Hindoos were over him.

They quickly rifled his person.

"Ah, Mahdan, you found an easy victim!"

"Ay, but feel of his heart!"

"Is he dead?"

"Allah be praised! Now, away!"

And they vanished like shadows, taking with them the deadly cord which had done such fatal work.

Frank Reade, Jr., was much distressed when he learned that Gladwell had left the Van.

"It is a piece of folly!" he declared. "I gave him credit for more sense!"

Barney and Pomp shared the fears of their employer.

"I done tink some ob dem villains will pick him up!" declared Pomp. "What am it best fo' to do, Marse Frank?"

"I declare I don't know!" groaned the young inventor.

Frank waited in vain for Gladwell to return to the Van.

Hours passed and he didn't come.

The young inventor decided to take heroic measures.

He sent a native runner into the town to look for Gladwell.

The fellow returned with the report that he was not there.

Gladwell had been seen to leave the town, going toward the jungle with two of the natives.

He had not been seen since.

"It is as I thought!" groaned Frank, with horror. "He is doubtless a dead man long ere this."

But Frank decided to make a desperate move.

He did not venture to leave the Van.

Closing the doors, he started the Van through the town.

Barney and Pomp stood ready at the loopholes with rifles.

There was much excitement in the town.

The report had spread that the white sahib had been enticed into the jungle and had not returned.

Prince Sado-Dak was a villain of the deepest dye.

From the first he had kept vengeful and covetous eyes upon the Electric Van.

It had occurred to the native prince that the Van would make him an excellent coach of state.

As for scruples in the matter of gaining possession of the Van Sado-Dak had none.

He would without compunction butcher the whole gang to gain his desired ends.

With this thought he had secretly called together a few hundred of his warriors and instructed them.

The report of Gladwell's fate was the spark which kindled the flame.

As the Van went thundering down through the street of the town suddenly a perfect legion of Hindoos sprang into view and opened fire.

Frank saw the situation and its perils at a glance.

Quick action was necessary, or the fiends would surely succeed in getting away with their prey.

Frank was at the wheel, and he said to Barney and Pomp:

"Steady now! Give them the Winchesters as fast as you can load and fire!"

The two faithful servitors needed no second bidding.

They sprang to the loopholes.

In that moment a thrilling battle was begun, which was to prove a memorable occasion for all.

CHAPTER VI.

REFULSE OF THE HAMADOS.

THE Hindoos fired a volley at the Van. It had been their belief that the bullets would penetrate the steel network.

They expected at once to see the inmates of the wagon riddled with bullets.

But the leaden missiles only fell harmlessly against the steel netting.

Barney and Pomp now opened fire.

Both were excellent shots.

The Hindoos fell beneath their aim, and as the Winchesters could be fired with amazing rapidity, the volleys had a most telling effect.

Frank sent the Van crashing into their ranks.

It was utterly impossible for the wretches to stand before such an attack.

The heavy wheels of the Van crushed them, and the knives upon the hubs made fearful work.

Down through the gang like a thunderbolt went the Van.

It was utterly impossible for the Hindoos to stand before it.

Clearing the villainous crew, Frank turned the Van about and made another charge at the foe.

This time the Hindoos seemed determined to stop him.

The young inventor smiled.

He opened the key wide and sent the Van ahead at railroad speed. Like a meteor it went down into the midst of the dusky horde again.

Barney and Pomp kept the Winchesters popping.

In vain the Hindoos tried to stay the progress of the Electric Van. They might as well have tried to stop lightning in its course.

Scores of them went down under the destructive wheels.

"Give it to them!" cried Frank to Barney and Pomp.

Once again the Van reached the end of the street, and turned to once more charge through the village.

But the Hindoos had enough.

Sado-Dak was a wily and treacherous prince, but he was not reckless or utterly devoid of sense.

He saw that this dreadful invention of the white man could cut him all to pieces.

In fact, it was in Frank Reade, Jr.'s power to destroy the town.

So Sado-Dak threw out a white flag and called his men back.

Frank Reade, Jr., accepted the truce.

"I ought to destroy this nest of iniquity," he declared. "It would be a mercy to do so. I thought they would come to terms!"

One of the Hindoos now came up the street with the truce flag.

In a few moments Sado-Dak came up with his retinue.

Frank Reade, Jr., did not come out of the cage to talk with them.

He knew enough of the Hindoo nature to know better than to trust them too far.

Treachery was an inherent trait of their natures.

The prince made a fawning bow, and said:

"Great prince of an unknown nation, I come to offer peace. Will you not come to my palace and partake of hasheesh?"

This, of course, was conveyed to Frank through an interpreter.

Frank laughed contemptuously.

"I decline your offer!" he replied. "I do not trust you, treacherous prince, and there shall be war between us until you restore to me my friend, whom your Thugs decoyed away and whom I fear they have slain!"

Sado-Dak made reply:

"I know not the fate of your friend, sahib. I am not a Thug and cannot be responsible for their deeds!"

Frank replied in a voice of thunder:

"Unless you restore my friend to me I will proceed to burn your town, and will hunt every one of you to the death!"

Sado-Dak's face showed terror.

He turned and gave hurried orders to his servants.

Then he made reply:

"Be of good heart, white prince. Your friend shall be found whether dead or alive!"

"He must be produced alive!" said Frank, with emphasis.

This had the desired effect.

Bodies of soldiery were sent into the jungle.

Indeed it was not more than an hour later that the soldiers were seen returning.

Between them they bore the body of a man.

A cold sweat broke out upon Frank Reade, Jr.

"My God!" he gasped. "He is dead. They have murdered him!"

This seemed the truth.

The body of Gladwell was brought up to the Van. Frank Reade, Jr., sprang out and bent down over his friend.

He saw the tell-tale mark upon the circus owner's neck.

"The work of Thugs!" he groaned.

There was not the slightest hope in Frank's bosom that Gladwell was alive.

Yet he knew that it sometimes happened that the garroter failed to disconnect the spinal column.

In such a case the victim was known to have come to life after hours of utter unconsciousness.

Mechanically Frank lifted Gladwell's head and turned it.

The neck seemed to act freely and naturally. There was no indication but that the spinal cord was complete:

A thrill pervaded Frank's heart.

"He may not be dead!"

He listened to his heart and felt the pulse.

He fancied he could detect a faint beating. This was enough to revive his most sanguine hopes.

"Barney," he said, "bring me an electrode and a coil of wire with a disc. Connect the wire with the dynamo!"

"All right, sir!"

The order was quickly obeyed.

Frank arranged the electrical appliance by a method of his own.

The disc, heavily charged, was placed at the spine of the unconscious man.

Then slowly but firmly the current was turned on.

At first no effect was noticed.

Then there was a contracting of the muscles and a quivering of the eyelids.

Frank Reade, Jr., watched these signs of returning life carefully.

Not until he saw certain muscles in the face relax and the hue of life creeping into the white cheeks did he give vent to his feelings.

Then he cried:

"He lives! Thank Heaven he is not past help!"

The Hindoo spectators had watched the operation with superstitious wonder.

To them a man once strangled with the cord is considered past redemption.

To see Frank Reade, Jr., now bring this man to life was to them an astounding surprise.

They regarded the young inventor as a man of more than ordinary gifts, and possessed of a wonderful fetish.

Gladwell opened his eyes now and murmured:

"Where am I? God help me! What an awful dream!"

"You are with friends!" cried Frank. "Brace right up, old man. For once you are in luck. Your life is saved."

"Ah, I remember," muttered the circus proprietor. "The Thugs! I was garroted. But how did you save me?"

"Simply because the rascals failed in their work," replied Frank. Gladwell was soon sufficiently recovered to get upon his feet.

He was weak, as might naturally be supposed, but a more thankful person was never seen.

The experience had effectually cured him of anything like recklessness. He was prepared to use good sense in the future.

"I have been a fool!" he declared. "In the future, Frank, I will do just as you say."

"I am glad to hear you say that," said Frank. "I will not advise you for your injury, depend upon it."

"I know that well."

This ended the episode.

Gladwell was saved and all on board the Van were overjoyed.

Sado-Dak had been given a rich lesson and stood in fear of the Electric Van.

But this very fear made him crafty and treacherous.

He was determined to get square with Frank Reade, Jr., in some way.

On the other hand, the young inventor was determined to get out of Sado-Dak's way as quickly as possible.

Accordingly, without so much as wishing the treacherous prince good-day, he started the Van to the northward.

Along the verge of the great jungle for twenty miles the Van traveled.

Then Frank selected a good spot and drove the Van into the jungle at full speed.

The monster carriage went crashing through the dense grasses, and suddenly came into an open space in the very heart of the wilds.

It was a picturesque spot, and Frank, impelled by some motive, pressed the lever and brought the Van to a stop.

He had no sooner done this than a great cry went up from Barney.

"Begorra, Misther Frank, wud yez luk at the loikes of that!"

At that instant a wild scream came from the depths of the jungle, and out into the open dashed a Hindoo hunter.

He was out of breath and panting with terror.

Behind him, with long strides, came a powerful tiger of the man-eating species.

"Help, sahib, help!" shrieked the unfortunate Hindoo.

"Give him a shot!" cried Frank Reade, Jr.

But before any could get their rifles or make use of them the tiger was upon the Hindoo.

The fierce beast crushed the luckless fellow to the ground.

He fastened his powerful jaws in the Hindoo's shoulder.

Barney had got his rifle just in readiness to fire when out into the open sprang another tiger.

"Don't fire!" cried Frank Reade, Jr. "You'll hit the man."

"Bejabbers, I'll kill the other beast!" cried Barney.

So the Celt drew aim at the other tiger and blazed away.

The bullet went to a vital spot.

The huge beast rolled over in the death agony.

But no sooner had this been accomplished, when, with deep, cavernous roars, two more tigers sprang out of the jungle.

They were powerful specimens, and descended into the open with most savage mien.

The place seemed a regular tigers' den.

"Begorra, phwat have we struck now?" cried Barney, excitedly.

His voice seemed to madden the man-eaters. With hoarse roars, they sprang for the cage and the next moment came against its sides.

CHAPTER VII.

ELECTRIFYING THE TIGERS.

THE force with which the tigers assailed the cage was tremendous.

But the fine steel netting was by far too strong.

It successfully resisted their weight and the pressure.

In vain the tigers tried to force their way through the netting.

They clawed and tore at the netting fiercely.

Up onto the top of the cage they climbed and tried their best to get at the inmates of the cage.

Of course they were in perfect security and did not need to fear the ravenous beasts.

But yet it was impossible to get a shot at them, as they were not within range of any loop-hole.

But Frank Reade, Jr., quickly conceived an idea.

Two live wires handled with insulated gloves were brought from the dynamo room.

Barney took one and Frank the other, while Pomp turned on the full force of the current.

Then Frank thrust one of the wires up through the netting until it touched a paw of one of the tigers.

Barney did the same with the other paw.

This made a circuit.

They were the hinder paws of the beast. Frank cried to Pomp:

"Turn on the current. Give it the full force."

Pomp did as requested.

The circuit was instantly made.

The effect was thrilling.

In an instant a terrible throe went through the body of the tiger and it sank down dead.

Death had come instantly.

The mate of the tiger seemed amazed at the fate of his companion.

But even while he was apparently marveling thereat, he suffered a like fate.

Meanwhile, Gladwell had got a shot at the tiger that had the Hindoo hunter in its clutches.

The shot wounded but did not kill the beast, and it went limping off into the jungle in fear.

Gladwell and Barney left the Van and went to the side of the Hindoo.

But the fellow was dead.

"Well," said the circus manager, as he returned, "if this is a sample of the kind of animals we are to meet in the jungle, we shall have our hands full."

Then he gazed regretfully at the dead tigers.

"What a fine showing they would have made in my menagerie!" he declared. "It was a pity to kill them!"

Everybody laughed at this.

Once more the Van started to enter deeper into the jungle.

Progress was slow but sure.

At length nightfall came and found the Van deep in the heart of the Bang Chu jungle.

It was a thrilling position.

Wild animals of all species were numerous in that place.

With the setting in of darkness the distant howl of the hyena was heard.

Soon the shadows were filled with the forms of these ferocious animals.

Of course our friends were all safe in the Van.

Yet it was not exactly pleasant to sit so near to such a frightful array of foes.

Only the thin network separated our explorers from death.

Tigers and leopards and wild cats came down upon the top of the cage and made violent efforts to get into the cage and make a meal upon its occupants.

But this they were fortunately unable to do.

"In all my life I never saw so many wild beasts!" declared Frank Reade, Jr. "Really, it is appalling. I don't wonder that the Hindoo natives never dare to invade these jungles."

"Begorra, it's the worst I ever saw!" cried Barney; "this beats our thrip to Central Africa."

"Golly! Dis chile am not parshal to lions an' sich like!" said Pomp.

"De Bible sez dat de lamb shall lay down wif de lion, but I done flink de po' lamb wouldn't stan' much show yer 'longside o' dese yer lions!"

"I reckon they wouldn't, Pomp!" declared Gladwell. "But I've got an idea!"

"What am it, sah?"

"Suppose you get your banjo and play a tune. Let us see what effect it will have upon the beasts."

Barney and Pomp went after their instruments with alacrity.

Barney came out with his fiddle and Pomp with his banjo.

They struck up lively tunes and played for some moments.

The effect was magical.

Singularly enough, the hyenas ceased howling, and the tigers ceased their loud roaring.

The beasts seemed to be spell-bound by the music.

They appeared to listen intently. But the moment the music stopped they began to howl again.

"Who can say that music hath not charms to soothe the breast of savage beast!" quoth Gladwell. "I think you two chaps could charm some of those animals so that I could get them into my menagerie."

Everybody laughed at this.

But suddenly a peculiar thing happened.

The hyenas seemed to divide and slink away.

Some powerful influence seemed to have assailed the beasts.

Frank was the first to perceive the meaning of this.

He saw a white form suddenly emerge from the depths of the jungle.

There was something so majestic and so dignified about the appearance of this white figure that he could not help but note it.

"Look!" he cried. "As I live, it is the white tiger!"

Instantly the occupants of the cage seemed to partake of the same species of awe as had pervaded the beasts.

All gazed in silence for a moment at that grand white figure.

Then Gladwell broke the silence.

"By the great horn-spoon!" he cried. "I must have that for my menagerie."

Frank Reade, Jr., sprang to the search-light and turned it full upon the object of their interest.

The effect was sublime.

There, fully revealed, was the white tiger, and a beautiful specimen he was.

He stood gazing at the Van, lashing his long tail slowly.

The glare of the electric light did not seem to disconcert him in the least.

"Magnificent!" cried Gladwell. "I must have him for my show!"

"What shall we do?" asked Frank, picking up his rifle. "We can get him dead but I fear not alive!"

"Wait! Don't shoot him. There may be a way yet to get him!"

"I guess not."

At this moment the white tiger gave utterance to a tremendous roar.

It was so powerful and sonorous as to seem to make the ground tremble.

Then down across the intervening space came the beautiful monster.

Straight for the Van he came.

As his white body was hurled against the steel netting Frank tried a shot at him through one of the loop-holes.

But the tiger was clinging to the netting and this was impossible.

Frank thought of the electric wires and called to Barney.

The Celt came, but just too late.

The tiger went up over the top of the Van and then away into the jungle at full speed.

He was gone from sight almost instantly.

That was the last seen of the white tiger that night.

The howlings of the beasts was not conducive to good sleep, and yet our explorers were so extremely tired that they were glad to succumb to slumber.

When morning came the hyenas disappeared.

But three huge tigers were crouched upon the top of the cage.

Pomp and Barney wanted to give them an electric shock.

But Frank said:

"We will give them a ride."

Away went the Van, crashing through the jungle.

It was a novel experience to the tigers, and evidently not a pleasant one, for they leaped down from their perch and vanished into the jungle.

At every turn wild beasts were encountered.

There was no doubt but that our adventurers were now right in the heart of the jungle.

Frank had begun to look for the large lake which had been described to him by the natives.

He had seen nothing as yet of the fearful hydra-headed dragon said to exist in these parts.

But he had no doubt as to the existence of huge snakes.

Indeed, as the Van was going through a dense part of the jungle, one of the mighty monsters threw its huge folds completely about the Van.

The python tried to crush the steel structure.

But its utmost pressure did not even make the frame-work creep.

This python seemed even larger than the one which had been captured and sent home.

Gladwell was consumed with a mighty desire to secure this new specimen.

"I tell you he would be worth five thousand dollars in America!" he declared. "We ought to have him."

But Barney cut the monster in two through one of the loop-holes. This spoiled him for a specimen.

Suddenly the Van came out upon a huge open tableland in the center of the mighty jungle.

This table land was dry and arid, and seemingly devoid of anything to support life.

Yet, as the Van glided out upon the level expanse, a wonderful spectacle was presented.

There, not five hundred yards distant, stood an animal which, for size and peculiar shape, our adventurers had never before seen the like of.

It was a near approach to the elephant, though much larger and weightier.

Its body was covered with a long growth of thick brown hair. Its head was of tremendous proportions, and huge tusks were curling outward from its jaws for the length of full fifteen feet.

"What on earth is that?" gasped the circus man.

"Begorra, yez ought to have that fer yer show!"

"Golly! I done flink dat beat Jumbo sky high!"

But Frank Reade, Jr., was the first one to hit upon the character of the animal with any degree of accuracy.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LAKE SERPENT.

"WHAT is it, Frank?" asked Gladwell.

"It is a specimen of the megatherium family!" said Frank, positively. "An animal for centuries believed to have been extinct. But here is certainly a living specimen."

The explorers gazed with wonderment most intense upon this specimen of the supposed extinct mammoth.

It was an animal of certainly monstrous proportions. Jumbo, the famous giant elephant, was not to be compared with this monster.

The megatherium, for such it must be called, seemed to be cropping some stunted grass which grew upon the plain.

It appeared to take no notice whatever of the adventurers.

Indeed, the Van glided quite near to the monster, hardly attracting its attention.

The explorers were given a good opportunity to study this monster specimen of an extinct race.

Whether the megatherium had a mate or not they had no means of knowing. None was seen.

"What would not scientists give to be here at this moment!" cried Frank Reade, Jr., with excitement.

"You are right," agreed Gladwell. "It would be a discovery of value to them. Oh, how I would like him for my show! There'd be a million dollars in that fellow."

Everybody laughed at this.

Frank did not venture too near the mammoth, for he did not know what sort of freak the animal would take.

A slight blow of its trunk must have been enough to have demolished the Electric Van.

The creature kept on for some time feeding.

Then suddenly it started away with long strides into the jungle.

Its course made a literal roadway through the dense growth.

Frank turned the Van across the plain, and suddenly a cry escaped Barney's lips.

He pointed to the southward.

"Do yez see it, Mистер Frank?" he cried.

"What?"

"Shure it's wather!"

Frank saw at a glance that Barney was right.

A long line of silver was visible in the south. It was beyond doubt a body of water.

That it was the lake mentioned by the natives there was little doubt.

Frank headed the Electric Van towards it.

"Now for the serpent of the lake, as described by the Hindoos at Calcutta!" he cried. "I believe it a myth!"

"So do I!" cried Gladwell, rubbing his hands; "but if it is a reality, I hope we can rig up some scheme to capture him and run him into my show."

The Van every moment drew nearer to the body of water.

It was easy to see that it was a large lake.

Also it was dotted with islands.

Tropical foliage lined its shores, except where they broached upon the plain.

There they were sandy and shelving and a broad beach extended from the water's edge.

The Van was brought to a halt here. No wild animals were in sight and it was deemed safe to alight.

The water looked tempting, and Barney and Pomp proposed a swim in it.

It was quite a relaxation, after having been confined in the Van for so long.

There was no fear of the dreaded serpent described by the Hindoos, for our adventurers believed it a myth.

Barney and Pomp threw off their clothes and leaped into the warm waters.

Both were expert swimmers, and this was a rare treat for them.

They dived to the sandy bottom of the lake, and brought up beautiful shells and pebbles.

Barney, in diving, saw a brilliant, flashing light in the sand, and picked up the pebble which caused it.

When he came to the surface he held it up triumphantly.

"Begorra, it's the purtiest wan yet!" he cried. "Shure, there's all colors av the rainbow in it!"

Frank Reade, Jr., chanced to catch sight of it, and cried:

"Hold on, Barney! Let me look at the stone!"

"All roight, sor!"

The young inventor took the pebble in his hand.

One glance was enough.

"Upon my word, Barney!" he exclaimed, excitedly, "you have found a treasure! This is a genuine diamond!"

"Whurroo!" cried the astonished Celt. "Yez don't mean it, sor?"

"Yes, I do."

"A diamond, sor?"

"Sure!"

"Begorra, wud yez luk at the luck av me! Shure, an' is it worth much?"

"Four or five thousand, I should think."

Barney's delight was beyond expression. He could hardly control himself.

Gladwell was the most excited of any.

"Surely, we are in good diamond diggings!" he cried. "Oh, how I wish I could swim!"

The circus manager went to digging in the sands, in the hope of finding a vast treasure.

But though Pomp and Barney dived repeatedly and explored the bed of the lake well, they found no more.

This beautiful specimen seemed a fugitive in the locality.

There was nothing in the appearance of the soil or the locality to suggest the possibility of its being a diamond region.

It was a beautiful spot here by the lake, and Frank pictured it as just such a spot as Adam and Eve might have sought in the palmy days of Eden.

The day was spent upon the shores of the lake, and everybody thoroughly enjoyed it.

Barney and Pomp were exceedingly happy, and had a jolly time in the water.

Occasionally the cries of wild beasts could be heard in the distant jungle.

Once a tiger was seen to descend upon a helpless antelope and bear it away in triumph.

But none of the beasts ventured into the open in broad daylight.

But the day did not pass without a thrilling incident.

So secure did our adventurers feel in this spot that they did not take the usual precautions against attack.

Gladwell was some distance away in a sand-bank looking for diamonds.

Frank Reade, Jr., was the only one aboard the Van.

Barney and Pomp had dressed and were having a friendly wrestle in the sand, when suddenly there was a commotion in the waters of the lake.

A strange-looking object arose from the water.

It looked at first like the head of a huge monster of the turtle species.

Frank was the first to see it, and he was petrified with astonishment at the spectacle which ensued.

The waters of the lake seemed to boil, as if some huge body was disporting itself there.

Then up into the air to the height of fully a dozen feet reared the head and coils of a monster snake.

It was truly a frightful sight.

The snake's body was dark with a reddish tinge upon the belly. Its head was a frightful sight for fangs.

Barney and Frank tumbled over each other in their excitement and horror.

"Golly fo' glory!" screamed Pomp. "We'se gwine fo' to be swallowed up alibe jes' as suah as you'se bo'n!"

"Bejabbers, not if I know it!" roared Barney, making a break for the Van.

Gladwell, terrified at the appalling spectacle, had also made a dash for safety.

Frank threw open the doors of the Van and called to his companions.

There was little need of this, for they were coming with all speed. A moment more and Barney and Pomp came dashing into the wagon.

Gladwell followed them.

Barney sprang to the motor and Frank was at the wheel.

The gaze of all was upon the monster of the lake.

It was an appalling sight.

Those who beheld it never forgot it to their dying day.

The huge serpent seemed to fill the body of the lake, so huge were its proportions.

Indeed, it would have easily passed for the fabled sea serpent, famous in the lore of sea captains.

Its length Frank could not accurately estimate, but he guessed it to be fully seventy feet.

The reptile appeared to be a monster specimen of a species of water snake not uncommon in some parts of India, and which are said to reach the length easily of thirty and forty feet.

Water pythons they were called by the natives, and, indeed, it would seem that they well merited the name.

The explorers watched the movements of the reptile with a peculiar dull horror and fascination.

The water python did not seem to see them.

At least it made no movement toward them, but continued to disport itself in the lake.

Finally it took a long dive and came up fully a mile away and was seen to pull its monster body out of the water and crawl into the jungle.

All drew a breath of relief.

"Well," averred Frank Reade, Jr., "that beats all the snakes I ever saw."

"The natives were right," declared Gladwell; "the monster serpent is no myth. Oh, if I only had him for my show!"

"It is lucky that the monster did not attack us."

"You are right!"

"It would have crushed the Van with its ponderous weight."

"Begorra, I'd a good moind to take a shot at it," cried Barney.

"Huh! I done fink no bullet would kill dat snake!" declared Pomp.

"Phwat do yez know about it, naygur?" demanded Barney.

"Pomp is right!" averred Frank Reade, Jr. "No ordinary bullet would have killed that snake. It is lucky that you did not fire, Barney, or the reptile might have turned on us, and much to our sorrow!"

"That's right!" cried Gladwell. "I don't believe we will be able to capture that monster for my show, Mr. Reade!"

"No, I think not!" said Frank, dryly. "We will draw the lion at snakes seventy feet long!"

What new wonders the Bang Chu jungle held our explorers could only imagine.

But now that the monster snake had disappeared the courage of all returned.

As it was getting near dusk it was decided to remain upon the spot for the night.

There was no longer any fear of the monster serpent.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MONSTER TURTLE.

The reptile might not return, and even if it did, there was no actual harm that it was likely to do so long as our adventurers took care not to trouble his snakeship.

It was a more desirable place to camp than in the forest.

So Frank decided to spend the night upon the spot.

Camp-fires were made in the sand, and things made ship-shape.

But Barney and Pomp were possessed of a powerful desire to take one more dip in the limpid waters of the lake.

Of course there was the risk of the return of the serpent.

But they finally overmastered their fears and repaired to the lake shore.

Out in the lake they now espied what looked like a black, round, crowned rock above the water's surface.

It seemed a bit curious to them that they had not espied this before.

But they attached no significance to the fact.

"Well," cried Pomp, with a comical grimace, "I done like to make one hily bit ob a wager wif yo', sah."

"Yez would, eh?"

"Fo' suah."

"Well, phwat is it, naygur?"

"I like to bet wif yo' dat I swim out to dat rock fust."

"Yez mane to say that yez kin beat me to that rock?"

"Yo' am got it."

"Well, bejabbers, I'll take yez up on that!" cried Barney.

Into the water they leaped.

Away they swam like veritable ducks.

Nearer the supposed rock they drew every moment.

But Pomp was the better swimmer.

He was far ahead of Barney.

He bade fair to reach the rock long before the Celt.

The latter splashed and splurged in the water in a vain attempt to catch up with the ducky.

No use.

Pomp reached the rock and crawled upon it.

He was about to turn and wave his arms derisively to Barney, when an astonishing thing occurred.

The supposed rock suddenly moved beneath him.

Up it went out of the water higher and presenting a broader surface.

Then, to the ducky's amazement, he saw that he was upon the back of a giant turtle, the like of which he had never before seen.

The turtle evidently felt his weight upon its back, for it started at full speed across the lake.

Pomp was so bewildered that for a moment he could not act.

Barney saw the situation and started for the shore full tilt.

The Celt had no desire to remain longer in waters which held such monsters.

Pomp recovered himself and made action.

With a yell of terror he made a leap from the turtle's back.

Down into the water he went, and coming up also struck out for the shore.

The terror of the ducky and the Celt was comical to witness.

But the turtle was fully as terrified as either.

The reptile struck out at railroad speed for the middle of the lake, where it went below the surface.

Barney and Pomp emerged from the water and made for their clothing.

They donned it and returned in post-haste to the Electric Van.

It was their last swimming excursion in the jungle of Bang Chu.

Neither could be induced to enter the lake again.

Darkness was now settling down thick and fast.

Barney and Pomp were elected to take turns keeping watch.

They sat up until a late hour, however, playing the banjo and violin and singing jolly songs.

At length, however, all retired to rest but Barney.

The night was clear and moonlit, and the Celt could see objects very distinctly across the plain.

He remained by the key board and steering wheel ready to start the dynamos at a moment's notice.

The night hours wore away slowly.

Barney was drowsy, but he was too faithful a sentinel to give way to sleep.

He kept a good watch of the lake and plain, and after a time became impressed with a queer fact.

The surface of the lake seemed suddenly to become alive with wriggling creatures.

To all appearance they were snakes of various lengths not exceeding six or seven feet.

They appeared to perambulate about upon the lake's surface.

"Begorra, that's queer enough," muttered Barney. "Am I dram-in' or is it an optical illusion!"

But Barney soon became convinced that it was neither.

He turned the electric search-light about in such a position that its rays fell upon the water.

The wriggling forms were squirming thickest in the glare of the light.

Then a comprehension of the truth burst upon Barney.

"Bejabbers, I have it!" he cried; "the place is a-loive with eels!"

The Celt had hit upon the truth.

Attracted by the electric lights of the Van an immense number of eels had risen from the bed of the lake.

Hundreds of them could have been netted with ease upon the shores of the lake.

Barney scratched his head.

"Shure there's no harrum in eels," he muttered; "but phwativer else is there lives in that lake? Shure, I wondher hew we iver come out av it alive!"

Of one thing the lake seemed free and this was crocodiles.

But while Barney's attention had been claimed by the lake he had failed to keep an eye upon the plain.

From that direction there now came a hoarse, thunderous roar.

Barney turned and saw what appeared like a mighty black hill moving down upon the Van.

In an instant the Celt sprang up.

"May the Vargin save us!" he cried; "phwativer is coming now?"

It was the huge mammoth the explorers had seen in the afternoon. The monster was coming straight for the Van with a tread which shook the earth.

It was swinging its huge trunk and bellowing loudly. Barney was imbued with an awful terror.

But yet the Celt had sufficient presence of mind to press the dynamo key.

The Van glided forward and out of the path of the mammoth.

Barney let the Van run ahead for one hundred yards and then stopped it.

The danger was passed.

The megatherium had not attempted to pursue the Van.

In fact, the huge animal's purpose had been apparently not to attack the Van but to reach the water.

It now waded into the lake and proceeded to cut up curious antics. With its huge trunk it took up vast quantities of water and spouted it into the air and over itself.

It seemed to be part of a regular course of ablutions pursued by the giant animal, and was a sight to behold.

The starting up of the Van and the din made by the monster had aroused the others.

All watched the performances of the megatherium with keenest interest.

For some while the huge monster continued its play in the water.

Then it marched out and away across the plain.

No other incident worthy of note occurred that night.

But the next day Gladwell came to Frank Reade, Jr.

"Don't you think it about time to try and bag a white tiger?" he asked.

"We will try it to-day!" replied Frank.

"Alive?"

"Oh, of course!"

This pleased the circus manager, who entered into the plans with great interest.

But in order to bag the tiger it was necessary first to find one.

A pathway through the jungle was found and through this the Electric Van made its way.

The deeper they penetrated into the jungle the more evidence our adventurers found of the existence of wild beasts.

At every turn the lair of a tiger, a wolf or a panther was invaded.

The savage animals in the majority of cases made off in fear.

But there were some disposed to dispute the situation.

Such usually fell victims to the bullets of the explorers.

To capture a white tiger alive, Frank knew was no light undertaking.

Yet the young inventor had fully made up his mind to that end.

And with Frank Reade, Jr., to undertake an enterprise was seldom to fail.

The circus manager, Gladwell, was in the highest of spirits.

The closest watch was kept for the coveted prize.

But they had penetrated miles of the jungle before they were rewarded with success.

Then, coming out at the base of a slight eminence, Frank Reade, Jr., saw a fine specimen of the wonderful white tiger leisurely walking across the clearing.

At once Frank pressed the lever and brought the Van to a stop.

Gladwell was fearfully excited and wanted to start at once in pursuit.

But Frank Reade, Jr., restrained him.

"Hold on where you are!" he said. "Don't do anything rash!"

"But how are you going to capture the beauty?" asked the circus manager.

"Leave that to me!"

"It looks as if you would just allow him to escape!"

"If you think you can capture the tiger alive, you had better try it."

This silenced Gladwell.

He saw the absurdity of his ideas, and replied:

"All right, Frank. Pardon my haste. I am excited."

"But this is not a time to get excited," said Frank. "Now is when you want a cool and steady nerve."

"You are right."

Frank watched the tiger closely.

He became satisfied presently that they were not far from the tiger's lair.

Indeed, at that moment the beast paused before a rocky opening in the side of the hill.

The beast glared at the Van a moment, and then, lashing its tail, entered the place.

Frank Reade, Jr., started the Van forward quickly.

"Get ready, all!" he cried. "Now we have some lively work to do. I mean to bag that tiger alive!"

The others needed no second bidding, but at once responded to the call.

CHAPTER X.

CAPTURING A TIGER.

"But how are you going to capture that beast alive, Frank?" asked Gladwell.

"Ask no questions but follow my directions," said the young inventor, tersely.

Barney and Pomp were directed to alight from the Van and take their stations near the mouth of the tiger's den.

Of course there was some little risk in this.

The tiger might come out to the attack.

In that case it would be safer to be in the Van than outside.

But Frank was inclined to take a few chances, for he knew that this was necessary before success could be assured.

But the tiger did not come out to the attack.

The savage beast wisely and prudently remained in its lair.

Frank now produced from the wagon locker a large and heavy net of coarsest and toughest material.

This he spread over the mouth of the cave.

One more net was brought forth and placed over this one.

One end of the net was held by Barney and the other by Pomp.

Then Frank said:

"Now, when the tiger comes out, be sure and pull hard on the net. When once he is in the meshes, don't be afraid of him, but rush up and wind him up in it. Do you see?"

"All roight, sor!"

"We'll jes' do dat!"

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Gladwell in disgust. "Do you expect to net the tiger?"

"That is just it," replied Frank.

"You can't do that!"

"Why?"

"He will tear those nets into strings."

"Do you believe that?"

"Of course!"

"Well," said Frank, sarcastically, "perhaps you can advocate a better way?"

"I can!"

"What?"

"We can make a trap of the Van, bait it and wait until the tiger is inside and then close the doors."

Frank Reade, Jr., was disgusted.

"I gave you credit for more sense than that, Gladwell!" he said.

"You should have known better."

Then he proceeded to bring out a quantity of oiled waste and rags.

This he placed in the mouth of the cavern.

It was but a moment's work to ignite them.

In a jiffy they were ablaze, and then Frank threw a blanket over the mouth of the cavern.

This sent the smoke and fumes down into the cavern.

Some little time passed.

The pile of oil waste burned and smoked intensely.

Certainly the tiger was getting a fine taste of it.

Frank believed that the smoke would be more than the beast could stand, and that he would soon seek more congenial quarters.

In this he was right.

After a time there came a loud roar from the cavern.

"Look out, boys!" cried Frank. "He is coming."

This proved true.

Out into the outer air sprang the white form of the tiger.

But right into the net he went and was instantly entangled in its meshes.

With a cheer Barney and Pomp rushed up.

They ran around the entrapped and struggling tiger, winding the meshes closer and closer.

The huge beast snarled and howled and struggled.

In vain its powerful claws strove to tear away the net.

It was futile.

The powerful strands held, and the tiger was effectually entrapped. Like a fly in the web of a spider, the powerful beast was helpless.

All tearing about and roaring was of no avail.

"Hurrah!" cried Frank, "we have his tigership."

Then he turned to Gladwell:

"Now what do you think of my plans for trapping tigers?"

"I haven't a word to say," declared the circus proprietor. "You are too much for me as well as for the tiger."

"Then you acknowledge that?"

"I do."

"That settles it," said Frank, with a laugh. "But there is your tiger. He may struggle some, but he can't get away."

"Egad!" exclaimed the delighted Gladwell, "I can hardly believe my good luck. That I should have gained possession of the greatest drawing attraction in the world makes me very happy."

"You are the only showman in the world who can exhibit a white tiger."

"It is a great card."

"It ought to be."

"But—what will we do with the beast?" asked Gladwell.

"What we did with the snake. Cage him and ship him to America."

"Ah, but how will we get him to Calcutta?"

"Easy enough," said Frank. "Put him aboard the Van and carry him to Hudi Jan. There charter a freight car and ship him to Calcutta as he is. Your agents there can cut away the nets, make a suitable cage, and send him home to your partner by the first steamer."

Gladwell rubbed his hands in glee.

"The only white tiger!" he muttered. "Ah! that will draw the world!"

All now laid hands on the tiger.

He was a monster, but they finally dragged him aboard the Van.

Then Frank Reade, Jr., declared his intention of returning to Hudi Jan.

"We can do nothing more until this fellow is shipped!" he declared.

"We may return to the jungle later!"

Nobody was averse to this.

Indeed, Barney and Pomp were more than willing to get out of the jungle for a time.

So, with the white tiger securely bound by the meshes of the net, the Electric Van started on the back trail.

It did not require a great length of time to return to the open country.

The Van came out not far from the village of Sado-Dak.

It was good going now, and Frank sent the Van tearing along toward Hudi Jan.

In due course the Van reached the small railway station.

The natives there were astounded at sight of Frank's captive. It was the first time that they had ever known of the capture of a white tiger.

Their religion taught them that the white tigers were under the protection of Brahma, and they never affected to hunt them.

But Frank Reade, Jr., did not care for this.

His faith was never of the superstitious order. Therefore the white tiger was not sacred in his eyes.

But men were found to prepare a box car with iron bars.

Into this the supposed violent and dangerous wild beast was placed.

Then the white tiger was billed to Gladwell's agent in Calcutta, with directions to ship to America.

All this had been done, and our explorers were about to re-enter the Van and return to the jungle for fresh adventures when a new incident occurred.

Suddenly a loud shouting was heard at the lower end of the village.

Frank Reade, Jr., saw a large gang of the natives coming, armed with spears and guns.

They were evidently in a very excited frame of mind, and the Van seemed to be the object of their spite.

"What's up?" exclaimed Gladwell, in surprise. "Something is wrong with the natives."

"So it seems!" replied Frank, in surprise. "I don't understand it."

"They are coming toward us!"

"Yes."

"What have we done to disgruntle them?"

"I don't know."

"Begorra, Mither Frank!" cried Barney, "I'm thinking we must be on the watch for thim rapscllions!"

"Right you are!" cried Gladwell. "They evidently mean us harm."

"Golly fo' massy sakes alibel!" cried Pomp, "does yo' see 'em comin', Marse Frank?"

"Everybody get their rifles," cried Frank, "but don't fire until I give you orders."

"All roight, sor!"

The natives now came on rapidly.

They made menacing gestures as they neared the Van.

But the sight of the rifle muzzles protruding from the Van was the means of bringing them to a halt.

Then one of their number advanced with his hands held up as a token of amity.

Frank went to a loophole.

"Well," he asked, tersely, "what do you want, sir?"

"Great prince, we salute you," said the fellow, obsequiously.

"We mean you no harm, but we come in the name of Brahma, to warn you that one of our gods chosen has been placed by you in durance vile."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank, in surprise. "Will you explain what?"

"The white tiger, most noble prince."

Frank saw the point at once.

The white tiger was regarded by the natives as a sacred beast.

It was akin to the sacred ox and was worshiped as a deity.

Indeed, superstitious natives were known to have thrown themselves in the way of the white tiger, and considered it a rare bit of good fortune to be devoured by the white deity.

Therefore, the act of the white men in capturing the tiger was desecration, and they could not permit it.

Frank was disgusted with their ignorance, but he saw at once that nothing he could say would disabuse their minds of the idea.

"Upon my soul!" he muttered. "What are we going to do with these fellows?"

"Eh?" exclaimed Gladwell. "What is it?"

"It begins to look as if you would not succeed in getting your white tiger out of the country."

"Indeed! Why not?"

"These natives regard it as a deity, and demand that you set it free!"

Gladwell was angry.

"Never!" he fumed. "Tell them we will fight them first. After all our trouble to capture him we will not give him up now!"

Frank was of Gladwell's mind, but before he could say anything to the natives matters were precipitated.

Some of the Hindoos made a break for the car in which the tiger was confined and made an effort to break into it.

They would no doubt have succeeded had they been allowed to persevere.

But Frank Reade, Jr.'s anger was up and he called to Barney:

"Steer straight for the car, Barney. Fire a volley over their heads!"

CHAPTER XI.

PUNISHING THE HINDOOS.

Matters were getting exciting.

Frank Reade, Jr.'s blood was up and he was incensed at the blind ignorance and stupidity of natives who would consider the white tiger a deity.

"I'll fix them!" he muttered.

As the Van bore down toward the car Frank went out on the platform and shouted:

"Get away from there! Let that car alone!"

But he might as well have talked to empty air.

The natives kept on hacking at the car.

In a few moments they would have succeeded in cutting their way in. But the volley fired from the Van over their heads was not without effect.

Part of them recoiled.

Again Frank Reade, Jr., shouted:

"Get away from there or it will be the worse for you!"

In reply the natives came yelling toward the Van.

Shots were fired, and Frank narrowly escaped them.

The young inventor dodged into the cage.

The Hindoos, like a pack of savage wolves, were coming down upon the Van with great fury.

There was no use in further delay.

It was a question of self-preservation, and Frank cried:

"Give it to them!"

The rifles flashed and bullets sped through the air.

The volley was given with deadly effect, too. A number of the Hindoos fell.

Frank set the Van going forward at full speed.

The Hindoos in vain tried to check its course.

It mowed a path through them, and destructive volleys were given.

In less than three minutes the Van was master of the situation.

The natives were fleeing for their lives and did not return.

Now the employees of the railroad came out and in terms of much sincerity they pressed their regret to Frank that such a thing had occurred.

Frank was shrewd enough to hold them responsible.

"We are not responsible, sahib, for the acts of a lawless mob!" declared the head chief of the railroad. "We can have no control over such a crew!"

"Do you mean to say that you are not in sympathy with that gang?" asked Frank.

"I assure you of that, sahib!"

"Then you will oblige me by protecting that car."

"Sahib, an engine shall be brought up and it shall be carried at once to Calcutta," declared the railroad official.

"Very well!"

And this was carried out to the letter.

The Van had no more trouble with the natives in Hudi Jan.

Indeed, they rather affected great friendship for the Americans.

A few hours later one of the peasant class came to the Van in an agony of grief and tears.

"Oh, sahibs," he cried, "I humbly pray thee to help me. The man-eater has carried away my youngest child to the jungle. I know not but that the beast has devoured it, yet I would fain go to its help!"

"And it is a worthy man who sues thee!" cried the railroad official.

Frank Reade, Jr.'s sympathy was at once aroused.

The story was quickly told.

The child had been playing in the grove of palms near the bungalow, when a huge tiger had pounced upon it and bodily carried it away.

A party of armed men had pursued it to the Bang Chu jungle, but they dared go no further.

The child had no doubt been taken to the tiger's lair.

It was probable that the innocent one had been devoured long before this.

But there were cases on record in which the tiger had kept its prey alive in its den even for days.

This hope had remained in the agonized parent's breast.

Of course the Americans were all enlisted in his sympathy.

"Begorra, we'll thrack down the baste, anyhow!" cried Barney.

"Right!" cried Frank. "Show us the way, sahib, and we'll try and rescue your dear one."

The Hindoo father was overjoyed, and showed profuse expressions of gratitude upon the young inventor.

He led the way to the spot in the jungle where the tiger had entered.

Frank sent the Van crashing through the reeds.

But it was not necessary to go far or make an extended search before the trail was struck.

In a clearing in the heart of the jungle the man-eater's tracks were seen.

They extended into a part of the jungle too dense for the Van to go.

Frank, however, was not to be baffled.

He returned to Gladwell and said:

"You will oblige me by remaining on guard aboard the Van. Barney and Pomp and I will go in quest of the tiger."

"All right, sir!" agreed Gladwell. "I will do my duty."

Barney and Pomp were delighted with the idea of a hunt in the jungle.

They procured their weapons and hastily joined Frank.

But the young inventor now produced what was really one of his most wonderful inventions.

This was a coat of mail made of the finest and toughest steel, and which was capable of resisting a rifle ball.

From head to foot this coat of mail covered the wearer.

Barney and Pomp each had a suit as well as Frank.

"Are yez goin' to put on thim, Mither Frank?" asked Barney.

"Yes," replied the young inventor. "Get into them lively!"

The two servitors quickly obeyed.

The coats of mail would certainly be a great protection against the tiger's teeth and claws in case either was assailed.

Thus equipped they left the Van.

It was an easy matter to follow the tiger's trail through the deep grass.

For some distance it was followed.

Frank looked apprehensively for blood marks.

He would not have been surprised to have found the marks of the rearing in pieces of the victim.

But nothing of this sort was discovered.

The trail finally led from the deepest part of the jungle into an open glade.

Suddenly Barney clutched Frank's arm wildly.

"Howly Moses!" he gasped. "Wud yez luk at that!"

Indeed the spectacle was one well calculated to chill one's blood.

From a distant copse the giant form of a tiger was seen to glide.

In the monster's jaws was the form of the Hindoo child held suspended by its dress.

The tiger was crossing the open slowly and lashing its tail.

It did not seem aware of the presence of its foes.

"Phwat shall we do, Mистер Frank?" cried Barney. "Wud yez give it a shot?"

"Wait a moment," said Frank.

He crept cautiously out into the long grass.

The result was startling.

Suddenly from another copse near a second tiger bounded forth.

With a hideous roar the brute seemed about to throw itself upon the young inventor.

But Barney and Pomp's rifles spoke sharply.

The tiger was struck but not fatally wounded.

With a maddened roar it turned and dashed for the two servitors.

Frank gave one glance in that direction. He saw that Barney and Pomp were well prepared.

Therefore, he did not offer to go to their aid.

He was thinking of the child in the grip of the other tiger.

The effect of the melee upon the other tiger was surprising.

To Frank's surprise he dropped the insensible child and turning faced Frank in seeming anger.

This was just what the young inventor wanted.

He knew that if he could divert the tiger's attention now the child might stand a chance of being saved.

So Frank raised his rifle, took steady aim and fired.

He aimed directly for the beast's eye.

It was a capital mark and Frank was a dead shot.

Under certain circumstances he could have dropped the animal.

But the tiger moved its head just a little bit.

It was enough to divert the bullet.

The leaden missile struck into the brute upon the hard bone just over the eye and glanced off the skull.

It stunned and maddened the tiger to a great extent.

The beast staggered for a moment.

Then with a maddened roar it started for Frank.

The young inventor had just time to get out of the way.

The beast, with a long stride, cleared the intervening distance, but

Frank dodged behind a banyan tree.

The tiger passed him with the force of his impetus, but quickly whirled.

This was Frank's opportunity.

He fired again.

This time the bullet struck a vital spot.

It penetrated the beast's hide just under the forearm.

The tiger dropped dead instantly.

Barney and Pomp, however, were having a more serious time.

The tiger which attacked them was indeed a monster, and their bullets seemed to have no more effect upon him than pellets from a blow gun.

At such close quarters they were unable to avoid a close encounter.

The tiger sprang upon Pomp and crushed him to the ground.

The monster's huge teeth grated upon the darky's mail-clad shoulder.

But they were not powerful enough to penetrate the flesh.

Pomp drew a long knife and began jabbing it into the tiger's body.

It was a terrific struggle.

Barney joined forces with Pomp and the battle went on.

The tiger seemed really to have the proverbial nine lives.

Barney was knocked down by the tiger's powerful paws half a dozen times.

But the beast was getting weak, and as Frank Reade, Jr., now came up and put a bullet through him at short range, the battle was ended.

CHAPTER XII.

THE JUNGLE FIRE.

It was a plucky fight and a commendable victory for our explorers.

Two tigers lay dead upon the ground.

There seemed to be no more in the vicinity, or if so they did not come to the attack.

Frank Reade, Jr., pulled himself together, as did Barney and Pomp.

"Begorra, did yez iver see the loikes av sich a baste as that wan?" cried the Celt. "He wud stand a rigimint av min, I'm thinkin'."

"He was a powerful beast," agreed Frank.

"Golly! I done feel as if I had been run ober by a train ob cars!" declared Pomp, lugubriously.

But now all thought of the object of the quest.

Frank soon had the little Hindoo child in his arms.

It was just opening its eyes as he picked it up.

After a long period of insensibility, the little one was returning to consciousness.

Frank caressed it and prevented its giving way to greater terror.

The child in a few moments was prattling away happily in its native tongue.

The return was made to the Van.

But before they reached it shots were heard.

When they suddenly came in sight of the vehicle, a thrilling sight was beheld.

Two huge tigers were clinging to the cage and clawing fiercely, trying to get into it.

Gladwell was tremendously excited and was trying to get a shot at the tigers.

At sight of his returning companions Le gave a shout.

"Give them a shot!" he cried. "I can't get at them!"

"Steady all!" cried Frank Reade, Jr. "Now give it to them!"

The three rifles cracked.

One of the tigers dropped.

The other bounded from the top of the cage and away into the woods.

A few seconds later the three tiger hunters were clambering aboard the wagon.

Gladwell was overjoyed at their safe return.

"I heard the firing," he declared, "and I feared for you all."

"Whurroo!" cried Barney. "Av we kape on, shure we'll make the record av the world on tiger hunting!"

"Golly, dat am right!" cried Pomp. "I done fink dere am too many tigers hereabouts fo' us though."

"You are right," agreed Frank. "We might hunt tigers all our lives in this jungle, and then not succeed in clearing them out utterly."

"Then you think it best to give up the idea of cleaning out the Bang Chu jungle?" asked Gladwell.

"I consider it an impossible feat," replied Frank.

"But was not that one object of your mission to India?"

"Oh, certainly!"

"And you will abandon it?"

"Of necessity."

"And will you soon return home?"

"No," replied Frank. "I shall explore a part of Indo-China before I am done with this excursion."

"And may I accompany you?"

"Certainly!"

"A thousand thanks, Mr. Reade!" cried the circus manager, rubbing his hands with great delight.

"You will no doubt find some animals there worth shipping home."

"I am sure of it."

The Van was now headed for the return to Hudi Jan.

In a short while it emerged from the jungle at the spot where it entered.

A large crowd of Hindoos were there in eager waiting.

Among them was the Hindoo father.

Frank restored his child to him and the fellow's gratitude was beyond expression.

He clasped his child to his breast and then fell down and kissed Frank's feet in his deep gratitude.

But the young inventor broke away and sprang into the Van.

"One more trip into the jungle," he cried, "then for Indo-China!"

The Hindoos gave loud cheers of good feeling for the travelers.

Frank sent the Van once more into the jungle and all began to look now for new and thrilling incidents.

These were at hand, and in good store, as the near future revealed.

For some hours the Van was kept at work cutting its way through the jungle.

Frank reckoned that they had come several miles, when suddenly a startling thing occurred.

They had entered a clear space in the heart of the jungle.

Suddenly a curious sound filled the air.

It was a powerful hissing, like the escape of steam from a pipe.

"What on earth is it?" cried Gladwell, springing up.

But Barney cried:

"Fer goodness' sakes, wud yez jes luk at the ground!"

An astounding spectacle was presented.

The ground was seen to be literally covered with a wriggling, hissing mass of cobras.

They were so thick that they actually carpeted the ground, and were crushed in hundreds under the wheels of the Van.

Frank had brought the Van to a stop.

The reptiles were swarming up the spokes of the wheels, striking furiously right and left.

"Upon my word, I never saw so many snakes before in my life!" cried Gladwell.

"Wha' fo' goodness' sakes does dey come from?" cried Pomp.

"Begorra, it's a hull army ob dem on de march!" cried Barney.

This was a seeming fact.

The snakes all seemed to be working in one direction.

It was a curious phenomena.

But it was shortly explained in a most thrilling manner.

Suddenly Frank cried:

"Listen!"

From the distance there came a rumble like rolling thunder.

It seemed every instant to swell louder and louder.

Then there was a crashing in the undergrowth and an antelope went bounding by.

In another moment several more followed.

Then came tigers, leopards, bears, and all manner of beasts and reptiles.

All seemed flying before some dread foe.

"Begorra, phwat the devil ails thim anyhow?" cried Barney.

Indeed, this was a mystery.

But it was suddenly explained.

To the nostrils of all came a distant odor. It was unmistakably the smell of smoke.

"Fire!"

The adventurers exchanged startled glances.

It required no explanation to convince them of the magnitude of the danger which threatened them.

A fire in a jungle is a matter of no light sort.

A prairie fire is bad enough, but a jungle fire is much worse.

It is almost impossible to tell from what direction it comes, as the flames and smoke cannot be seen until almost upon one.

But in this case the course pursued by the beasts and reptiles told the tale.

If there is one thing the cobra fears it is fire.

If a jungle is of the kind that will burn, that is composed of canes, and light reeds and dry grass, is fired, every cobra in the place will swarm out.

Our explorers well knew the consequences of being overtaken by the fire.

Of course it would mean the destruction of the Van, if not death to themselves.

Frank Reade, Jr., knew this well, and at once headed for open ground.

He took the return trail, but had not gone half a mile when he saw flames and smoke ahead.

It would be madness to go in that direction, of course.

To turn the other way was just the same.

The fire was upon all three sides, and there seemed no way but to run before it.

There was no time to lose.

The faces of the explorers plainly showed their great apprehension.

Frank Reade, Jr., new well that it would be a close pull at best.

He headed the Van directly before the fire, and sent it forward as fast as was possible.

It was a fearful race.

Many obstructions were encountered and overcome.

Fallen trees had to be avoided, also groups of standing ones.

On rushed the Van.

But the fire gained.

Nearer it drew.

"My God!" cried Gladwell, in despair; "we shall be burned up alive!"

But just at that moment a cry of hope went up.

The Van cleared the undergrowth and came out into an open space.

It was a long plain, heavy with thick, dry grass.

The moment the fire struck it the grass rolled up in one mighty cloud of flame.

Close after the Van it came.

Frank put the lever full down and let the full current on.

Fortunately there were few obstructions of any account in the way.

On went the Van at a terrific speed.

And now a great cry went up from the voyagers.

Dead ahead of them they saw the shimmering waters of a lake.

At once they realized where they were. All looked familiar about them.

They could even see the spot where Barney and Pomp had bathed.

But alas! this was upon the opposite shore of the lake.

To make the circuit of the lake was impossible.

The flames had already shut in on either side.

Frank Reade, Jr., saw that they were in a fearful position.

The grasses here ran down into the waters of the lake.

There was not a spot of clear land anywhere in sight.

The Van could not cross the lake certainly. The flames were howling in the rear and upon both sides.

What was to be done?

It was a stupendous problem, and Frank Reade, Jr., felt keenly his inability to wrestle with it.

"My God!" he muttered, "we are lost! Death is upon us!"

Indeed, so it seemed.

Straight down to the water's edge went the Electric Van and came to a full stop.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE END.

THERE was no question but that the fate of the Electric Van was sealed.

The flames were now within three hundred yards.

They were coming on with race-horse speed every instant.

Even at that distance the heat was intolerable.

The voyagers were in a fearful state of mind.

"My God! We are lost!" repeated Frank Reade, Jr.

"The Van will be burned!" cried Gladwell. "But can we not escape?"

This was the only thing to be considered now.

Personal safety was of far more consequence than the Electric Van.

"Right!" cried Frank Reade, Jr. "Barney and Pomp, get out the rubber pontoon!"

This was a long canoe made of rubber, which, when unrolled and put up with braces, with the air chambers at the end filled, made a capital light boat.

Barney and Pomp were quick to obey orders.

They soon had the pontoon boat in readiness.

The explorers entered it when the air was so hot that their faces were blistered.

The flames were not one hundred yards away.

The Electric Van stood partly in the water.

But Frank knew well enough that it could not be saved.

The intense heat would fuse the metal and destroy the woodwork, as well as the delicate electrical machinery.

Frank took a last look at his pride and heaved a sigh.

Then the pontoon boat shot out into the lake.

In a few moments they were beyond the intense hot waves.

There they rested and sadly watched the destruction of the Van.

"This is terrible!" said Gladwell, sorrowfully. "What hard luck is ours!"

"Never mind," said Frank, determinedly. "I will supplant the Van with a new and greater machine."

The flames now completely enveloped the Electric Van.

In a few moments it was a helpless wreck.

The flames burned down to the water's edge, and for lack of fuel went out.

A great volume of smoke rolled up heavenward, and then the blackened spark-betworn plain was revealed.

The explorers now pulled sadly and slowly back.

They went ashore and stood for some time looking at the ruin.

There was nothing left of the Van but a heap of old iron.

"Well," said Frank Reade, Jr., after a time, "come, friends, let us get out of this locality!"

"Shure, Mither Frank," said Barney, "phwers is it we will go?"

"Back to Hudi Jan, then to Calcutta, and thence by first steamer home!"

"And not to Indo-China?" said Gladwell, disappointedly.

"Not this trip."

So they started out across the fire-blackened plain.

There were no wild beasts or reptiles now to fear.

These, such as survived the fire, were far away, fleeing before it.

Not a live cobra or even an insect was to be found anywhere.

In due course of time Hudi Jan was reached.

The Hindoo natives there, having recovered from their enmity toward the explorers, received them kindly.

The first train took them back to Calcutta.

Here Gladwell found his agent, and learned that the white tiger and the huge python had been shipped by a previous steamer.

"Now for America and a fortune," said the circus manager.

True to his word, Frank took passage on the next American steamer. Back to San Francisco the party went. The trip to Central India was at an end.

It could be said in most respects to have been a success.

Of course the loss of the Van was a serious catastrophe.

But Gladwell had accomplished his pet object and Frank had carried out his plan of visiting Central India.

Everybody in Readestown was glad to welcome the young inventor back.

Gladwell went at once upon the road with his show.

His most sanguine expectations were realized. He reaped a rich harvest.

Barney and Pomp were glad to get home once more.

But Frank Reade, Jr., said:

"I am not done. I shall supplant the Electric Van with even a greater wonder. Look out for my next."

And now, dear reader, with the hopes of in the future learning the character of this new project, let us take a leave of our characters and write

[THE END.]

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